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AVENGERS THE INITIATIVE

AFTER STAMFORD, CONNECTICUT WAS DESTROYED DURING A TELEVISED FIGHT BETWEEN THE NEW WARRIORS AND A GROUP OF DANGEROUS VILLAINS, A FEDERAL SUPERHUMAN REGISTRATION ACT WAS PASSED. ALL INDIVIDUALS POSSESSING PARANORMAL ABILITIES MUST NOW REGISTER WITH THE GOVERNMENT. DISAGREEMENT OVER THE ACT SPLIT THE SUPERHUMAN COMMUNITY IN TWO, WITH TONY STARK--IRON MAN--AS THE FIGUREHEAD FOR THE PRO-REGISTRATION MOVEMENT AND CAPTAIN AMERICA LEADING THE ANTI-REGISTRATION RESISTANCE. NOW, WITH CAPTAIN AMERICA'S SURRENDER AND ASSASSINATION, THE SUPERHUMAN CIVIL WAR IS OVER. TONY STARK HAS BEEN APPOINTED DIRECTOR OF S.H.I.E.L.D., THE INTERNATIONAL PEACEKEEPING FORCE. HE HAS SET INTO MOTION **THE INITIATIVE,** A PLAN FOR TRAINING AND POLICING SUPER HEROES IN THIS BRAVE NEW WORLD, INTENDED TO POSITION A LOCAL SUPER HERO TEAM IN EACH OF AMERICA'S FIFTY STATES.

STAFF

YELLOWJACKET

JUSTICE

THE GAUNTLET

WAR MACHINE

BARON VON BLITZSCHLAG

HENRY PETER GYRICH

TRAINEES

CLOUD 9

HARDBALL

KOMODO

TRAUMA

M.V.P. (DECEASED)

WHEN A TRAINING EXERCISE INVOLVING NEW RECRUITS CLOUD 9, HARDBALL, KOMODO, TRAUMA, M.V.P. AND ARMORY GOES AWRY, M.V.P.--THE MOST PROMISING TRAINEE IN THE INITIATIVE--IS KILLED. ARMORY, WHOSE WEAPON CAUSED M.V.P.'S DEATH, WASHES OUT OF THE PROGRAM. ALL THOSE PRESENT IN THE ROOM DURING THE ACCIDENT ARE TOLD THE INCIDENT NEVER HAPPENED. AS FAR AS THE INITIATIVE IS CONCERNED, M.V.P. NEVER DIED IN STAMFORD.

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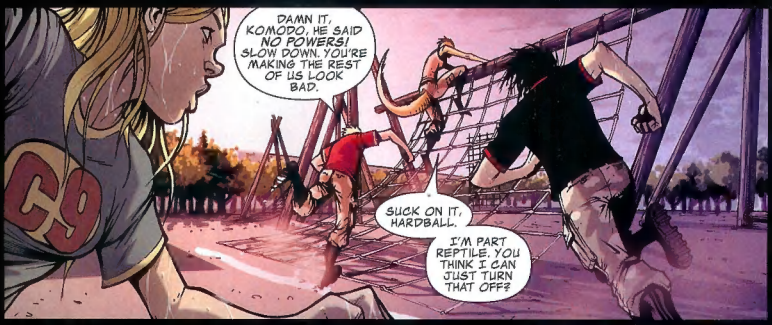
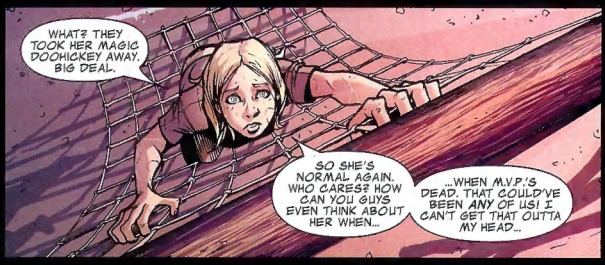
Camp Hammond
JIM HAMMOND THE FIRST OF THE HUMAN FORCE FIRST OF THE MANNED HE SHOWED US WHAT A HEROIC CAMP WE MADE
Stamford, Connecticut.
NO SUPER POWERS!
SHOW ME YOU CAN DO THIS WITHOUT 'EM!
SHOW ME THAT YOU DESERVE 'EM! OR ARE YOU JUST A BUNCH OF NEW WARRIORS?!
IS THAT WHAT YOU WANT TO BE? A BUNCH A' NO-GOOD BABY-KILLERS?!!
NO, SIR! GAUNTLET, SIR!
THIS ISN'T RIGHT, HANK. THE NEW WARRIORS WERE HEROES. LIVING UP TO THEIR STANDARD SHOULD BE A GOAL...
...NOT A PUT-DOWN. DO YOU KNOW HOW MANY TIMES THE WARRIORS SAVED THE WORLD? DO YOU?
THAT DOESN'T MATTER, VANCE. PEOPLE ONLY REMEMBER THE ONE TIME THEY SCREWED UP...
...AND A TOWN. THIS TOWN. PAID THE PRICE.
WE HAVE TO MAKE SURE THAT EVERY KID WHO MAKES IT THROUGH THE INITIATIVE IS BETTER THAN THAT.
THAT THEY'RE HEROES AMERICA CAN LOOK UP TO.
I KNOW. THAT'S WHY I RECRUITED M.V.P. HE'S PERFECT FOR THAT. THE KIND OF KID WE SHOULD BE PUTTING FRONT AND CENTER...
...BUT I HAVEN'T SEEN HIM FOR DAYS. WHERE ARE YOU GUYS HIDING HIM?
THAT'S... CLASSIFIED.


DAMN IT, KOMODO, HE SAID NO POWERS! SLOW DOWN. YOU'RE MAKING THE REST OF US LOOK BAD.
SUCK ON IT, HARDBALL.
I'M PART REPTILE. YOU THINK I CAN JUST TURN THAT OFF?

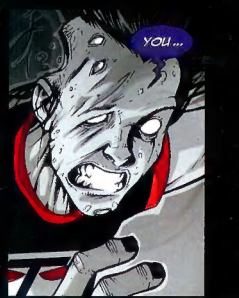
THANKS A LOT! I HATE BUSTING MY HUMP, BUT I AM SO NOT WASHING OUT OF THIS PROGRAM!
I JUST GOT MY POWERS, AND THERE'S NO WAY I'M LETTING UNCLE SAM STOP ME FROM USING THEM!
THEY CAN DO THAT? THEY CAN REALLY DO THAT?

WHAT SHOW ARE YOU WATCHING, TRAUMA? OF COURSE THEY CAN.
YOU SAW WHAT THEY DID TO ARMORY.


WHAT? THEY TOOK HER MAGIC DOOHICKEY AWAY. BIG DEAL.
SO SHE'S NORMAL AGAIN. WHO CARES? HOW CAN YOU GUYS EVEN THINK ABOUT HER WHEN...
...WHEN M.V.P.'S DEAD. THAT COULD'VE BEEN ANY OF US! I CAN'T GET THAT OUTTA MY HEAD...

CAN'T STOP THINKING ABOUT IT...
CLOUD 9? STOP! PLEASE, YOU...

...ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM.
YOU HAVE TO...


YOU...

HERO MOMENT
DAN SLOTT WRITER
STEFANO CASELLI ARTIST
DANIELE RUDONI COLOR ART
VC'S JOE CARAMAGNA LETTERER
MOLLY LAZER ASSISTANT EDITOR
TOM BREVOORT EDITOR
JOE QUESADA EDITOR IN CHIEF
DAN BUCKLEY PUBLISHER
AHHHH!
YOU ARE WHAT HAPPENED TO M.V.P. HE DIED FOR YOU, CLOUD 9.
HE GOT HIS HEAD SHOT OPEN AND HIS BRAINS BLOWN OUT BECAUSE OF YOU!
M.V.P.

OH GOD! MAKE IT STOP!
THIS IS WHAT'S WAITING FOR YOU. FOR ALL OF YOU. ONE LUCKY SHOT. ONE SMALL MISTAKE.
AND THEN YOU'RE DEAD. DEAD. DEAD. DEAD!
TRAUMA. CUT IT OUT! THIS IS NOT COOL, MAN!
WHAT'S HE DOING?! NO ONE'S SUPPOSED TO KNOW! SHUT HIM UP!

I'LL HANDLE TRAUMA. YOU LOOK AFTER THE KIDS. SAY ANYTHING. CALM THEM DOWN.
BUT THE SUBJECT OF M.V.P. IS OFF-LIMITS.
WHAT? HANK. THE WHOLE REASON I'M HERE IS TO BE THEIR YOUTH COUNSELOR. IF THE CADETS CAN'T TALK TO ME ABOUT EVERYTHING~

IT'S OFF-LIMITS! AND THAT'S AN ORDER!

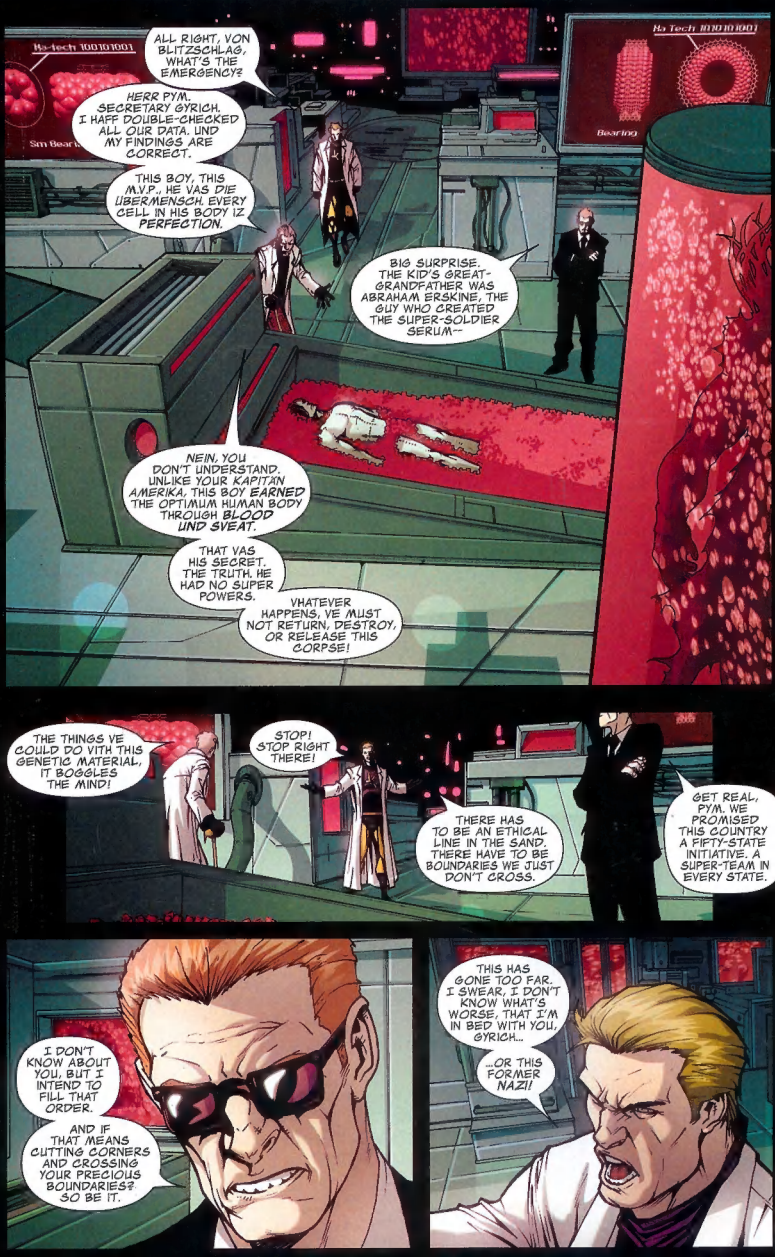
FINE! BUT WE'RE NOT DONE HERE, PYM.
DON'T I KNOW IT. TRAUMA. YOU'RE WITH ME! NOW!

WHAT WERE YOU THINKING?! WHY ON EARTH WOULD YOU PULL A STUNT LIKE THAT?!
SHE WAS SO AFRAID, I COULDN'T HELP IT. COULDN'T STOP THE CHANGE.
THAT'S HOW MY POWER WORKS. I CAN'T CONTROL IT.

DON'T YOU KNOW WHAT THAT'S LIKE? TO LOSE CONTROL? WAIT...
...YOU DO, DON'T YOU?

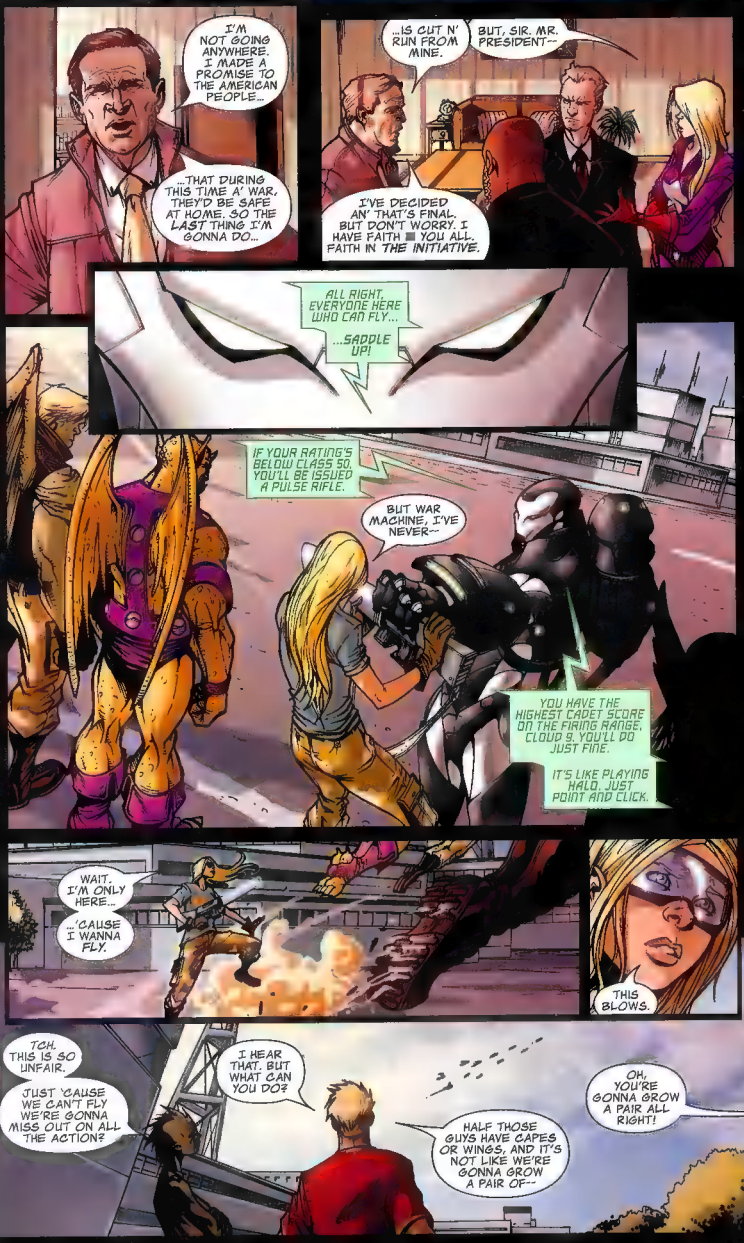
YOU LOST CONTROL ONCE. AND NOW...
THIS IS WHAT EVERYONE THINKS OF WHEN THEY LOOK AT YOU.
THIS IS ALL THEY EVER THINK OF WHEN THEY LOOK AT YOU.
NO!
PYM?! SNAP OUT OF IT!
JUSTICE?
J-JANET? JAN?
I-I'M SORRY, DEAR LORD, I AM SO SORRY.
I'VE GOT HIM. TRAUMA? YOU OKAY?
IS HE OKAY? DID YOU SEE WHAT HE DID TO YELLOW-JACKET?! TO THE GIRL?
ALL I SEE IS SOMEONE WHO NEEDS MY HELP.
IT'S MY POWERS. I CAN'T... I CAN'T...
DON'T WORRY. I KNOW PEOPLE. WE'LL MAKE SOME CALLS. WE'LL GET THIS UNDER CONTROL.
BUT FIRST, I THINK IT'S TIME THE "ADULTS" HAVE OURSELVES A LITTLE CHAT.
FINE. YOU WANT TO BE PART OF OUR "SECRET CLUB"? THAT'S ALL RIGHT BY ME. HOW ABOUT YOU...
...PYM?

Yellowjacket's Quarters.
WHERE ARE THEY? THEY'VE GOTTA BE HERE SOMEWHERE...
GOOD.
THERE'S STILL SOME LEFT.
THANK GOD, 'CAUSE I REALLY NEED...
ANXIETY-
I NEED...
JANET? IS IT IMPORTANT?
I DON'T KNOW. THEY HUNG UP.
SO ANDRÉ, ABOUT LAST NIGHT...
YELLOW-JACKET, PLEASE REPORT TO THE LAB.
THIS IS FOR DR. PYM. WE REPEAT, YOU ARE NEEDED IN THE LAB.

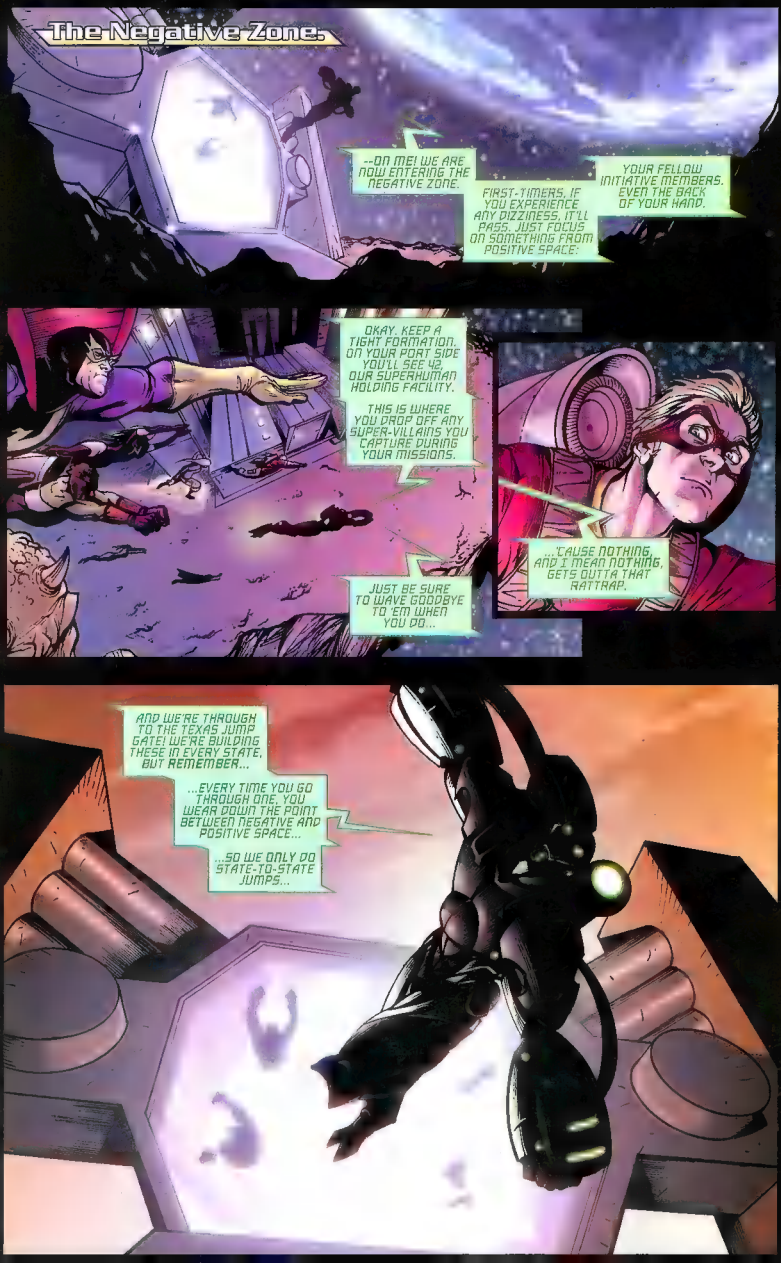

Ka-tech 100101001
ALL RIGHT, VON BLITZSCHLAG, WHAT'S THE EMERGENCY?
HERR PYM. SECRETARY GYRICH. I HAFF DOUBLE-CHECKED ALL OUR DATA. UND MY FINDINGS ARE CORRECT.
THIS BOY, THIS M.V.P., HE VAS DIE UBERMENSCH. EVERY CELL IN HIS BODY IZ PERFECTION.
BIG SURPRISE. THE KID'S GREAT-GRANDFATHER WAS ABRAHAM ERSKINE, THE GUY WHO CREATED THE SUPER-SOLDIER SERUM--
NEIN, YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND. UNLIKE YOUR KAPITAN AMERIKA, THIS BOY EARNED THE OPTIMUM HUMAN BODY THROUGH BLOOD UND SWEAT.
THAT VAS HIS SECRET. THE TRUTH. HE HAD NO SUPER POWERS.
VHATEVER HAPPENS, VE MUST NOT RETURN, DESTROY, OR RELEASE THIS CORPSE!
Ka-Tech 100101001
Bearing
THE THINGS VE COULD DO VITH THIS GENETIC MATERIAL. IT BOGGLES THE MIND!
STOP! STOP RIGHT THERE!
THERE HAS TO BE AN ETHICAL LINE IN THE SAND. THERE HAVE TO BE BOUNDARIES WE JUST DON'T CROSS.
GET REAL, PYM. WE PROMISED THIS COUNTRY A FIFTY-STATE INITIATIVE. A SUPER-TEAM IN EVERY STATE.
I DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU, BUT I INTEND TO FILL THAT ORDER.
AND IF THAT MEANS CUTTING CORNERS AND CROSSING YOUR PRECIOUS BOUNDARIES? SO BE IT.
THIS HAS GONE TOO FAR. I SWEAR, I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S WORSE, THAT I'M IN BED WITH YOU, GYRICH...
...OR THIS FORMER NAZI!

HERR PYM, YOU VOLIND ME.
JA. I VAS A NAZI--UND A SUPER-VILLAIN. BUT NOTHING NOTEVORTHY. NOTHING VHICH COULD HOLD A CANDLE TO YOU.
WHAT?
HERR DOKTOR. YOU ARE THE MAN WHO CREATED ULTRON!
THE AVENGER WHO CONSTRUCTED SALVATION I, A GIANT ROBOT, TO ATTACK HIS OWN FRIENDS.
UND MY FAVORITE...
...THE GENETICIST WHO HELPED ENGINEER THIS BEAUTIFUL, BLONDE-HAIRED, BLUE-EYED CLONE!
THE TEUTONIC GOD WHO KILLED YOUR BLACK GOLIATH!
MEIN GOTT. DON'T HATE ME, HERR PYM. FOR I AM YOUR GREATEST FAN!
SHUT UP! SHUT THE HELL UP BEFORE I--
SCRAMBLE! SCRAMBLE! ALL INITIATIVE MEMBERS FALL IN!
FULL ALERT
WE HAVE A PRIORITY ONE EMERGENCY! FALL IN!

MISSION UNFOLDING:
AT DEFCO THIS CHIEF SENSOR DETECTED AN ILLEGAL TELEPORT INTO THE ZONE OVER [illegible] TEXAS
[illegible] SENDS [illegible] WITH A FULL COMPLEMENT OF URBAN JETS EMERGED SEVEN MINUTES OUT FROM [illegible] A.F.B. THIS WORLD'S [illegible] HOUSE
THE U.S. IS ON THE BETA. SUPER-HUMAN ARMED FORCES HAS BEEN DEPLOYED.
WE ARE ENGAGING THE ENEMY
THIS IS INSANE! FOR EVERY ONE I SHOOT DOWN, ANOTHER HALF DOZEN TAKE OFF!
HANG IN THERE, MIGUEL. WE JUST GOTTA HOLD 'EM OFF TILL THE CAVALRY GETS HERE.
THE TEXAS-BASED RANGERS ARE FIRST TO RESPOND AND TEXAS TWISTER IN THE
RED WOLF
AY! SO YOU THINK AFTER TODAY THESE PROTESTORS WILL STILL BE AGAINST THE WAR ON TERROR?!
THEY'RE AGAINST THE WAR IN IRAQ, ANTONIO! THOSE ARE TWO DIFFERENT THINGS!
ENOUGH, YOU TWO! Y'ALL CAN TALK POLITICS LATER.
RIGHT NOW, WHAT SAY WE GET ALL THESE PEOPLE TO SAFETY?
FINE! AS LONG AS THE PRESIDENT IS SECURE!
WE CAN CONFIRM THAT THE FIRST LADY HAS BEEN ESCORTED OFF THE PREMISES--
BUT NOT THE C.I.C., THE COMMANDER IN CHIEF? I'M SORRY, GENTLEMEN...
...BUT I'M GONNA HAVE TO ASK YOU TO STEP ASIDE. IF YOU AIN'T GONNA DO YOUR JOB, THEN I'M GONNA HAVE TO--
NO.


I'M NOT GOING ANYWHERE. I MADE A PROMISE TO THE AMERICAN PEOPLE...
...THAT DURING THIS TIME A' WAR, THEY'D BE SAFE AT HOME. SO THE LAST THING I'M GONNA DO...
...IS CUT N' RUN FROM MINE.
BUT, SIR. MR. PRESIDENT--
I'VE DECIDED AN' THAT'S FINAL. BUT DON'T WORRY. I HAVE FAITH IN YOU ALL. FAITH IN THE INITIATIVE.
ALL RIGHT, EVERYONE HERE WHO CAN FLY...
...SADDLE UP!
IF YOUR RATING'S BELOW CLASS 50, YOU'LL BE ISSUED A PULSE RIFLE.
BUT WAR MACHINE, I'VE NEVER--
YOU HAVE THE HIGHEST CADET SCORE ON THE FIRING RANGE, CLOUD 9. YOU'LL DO JUST FINE.
IT'S LIKE PLAYING HALO. JUST POINT AND CLICK.
WAIT, I'M ONLY HERE...
...'CAUSE I WANNA FLY.
THIS BLOWS.
TCH. THIS IS SO UNFAIR.
JUST 'CAUSE WE CAN'T FLY WE'RE GONNA MISS OUT ON ALL THE ACTION?
I HEAR THAT. BUT WHAT CAN YOU DO?
HALF THOSE GUYS HAVE CAPES OR WINGS, AND IT'S NOT LIKE WE'RE GONNA GROW A PAIR OF--
OH, YOU'RE GONNA GROW A PAIR ALL RIGHT!

HERE! AVENGERS ISSUE JET-PACKS!
STRAP 'EM ON AND FOLLOW ME!
BUT--
BUT WE HAVEN'T LOGGED IN ANY TIME ON THESE!
I MEAN, DO YOU KNOW HOW TO BANK OR ROLL IN THIS? OR CHANGE THE SPEED OR THE PITCH OR--
PITCH. PITCH. PITCH. THAT'S ALL IT IS WITH YOU, ISN'T IT, BLONDIE?
IT'S A FREAKIN' JETPACK. JUST SWITCH IT ON! WHAT'VE YOU GOT TO LOSE?
YEAH, RIGHT. WHAT SHOW HAVE YOU BEEN WATCHING?
THE JUMP GATE'S FULLY CHARGED! INSTRUCTORS, STAY CLOSE TO YOUR CADETS!
RHODEY, WAIT! WE'VE GOT SOME LATE INTEL.
HYDRA'S BASE SHIP IS USING A NEW FORM OF ENERGY SHIELD. NOTHING'S BEEN GETTING THROUGH...
...BUT THIS PROJECTILE I'VE BEEN WORKING ON, THE "STINGER", MIGHT DO THE TRICK. ITS OUTER SHELL IS A VIBRANIUM ALLOY AND--
I'M ACCESSING THE SPECS NOW, HANK. GOOD DESIGN.
AND YOU COULDN'T HAVE CHOSEN A BETTER PAYLOAD.
ALL RIGHT! EVERYONE--

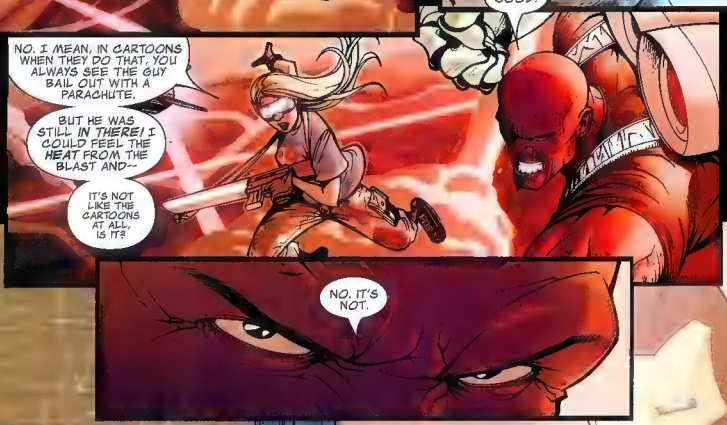

The Negative Zone.
--ON ME! WE ARE NOW ENTERING THE NEGATIVE ZONE.
FIRST-TIMERS, IF YOU EXPERIENCE ANY DIZZINESS, IT'LL PASS. JUST FOCUS ON SOMETHING FROM POSITIVE SPACE:
YOUR FELLOW INITIATIVE MEMBERS. EVEN THE BACK OF YOUR HAND.
OKAY. KEEP A TIGHT FORMATION. ON YOUR PORT SIDE YOU'LL SEE 42, OUR SUPERHUMAN HOLDING FACILITY.
THIS IS WHERE YOU DROP OFF ANY SUPER-VILLAINS YOU CAPTURE DURING YOUR MISSIONS.
...'CAUSE NOTHING, AND I MEAN NOTHING, GETS OUTTA THAT RATTRAP.
JUST BE SURE TO WAVE GOODBYE TO 'EM WHEN YOU DO...
AND WE'RE THROUGH TO THE TEXAS JUMP GATE! WE'RE BUILDING THESE IN EVERY STATE, BUT REMEMBER...
...EVERY TIME YOU GO THROUGH ONE, YOU WEAR DOWN THE POINT BETWEEN NEGATIVE AND POSITIVE SPACE...
...SO WE ONLY DO STATE-TO-STATE JUMPS...

"...WHEN ALL HELL IS BREAKING LOOSE!"
YEARGH!
THAT'S IT! THAT'S ALMOST ALL OF THEM! BEGIN FINAL DESCENT!
WAIT! CHECK THE SENSORS! THERE ARE MORE COMING IN RANGE!
ZRAKK
HOW MANY?!
I CAN'T KEEP TRACK OF THEM ALL, I--
HOW MANY?!
Hy-Msn
TOO MANY TO COUNT!
AVENGERS ASSEMBLE!
SCREW THAT! AVENGERS, KICK THEIR ASS!

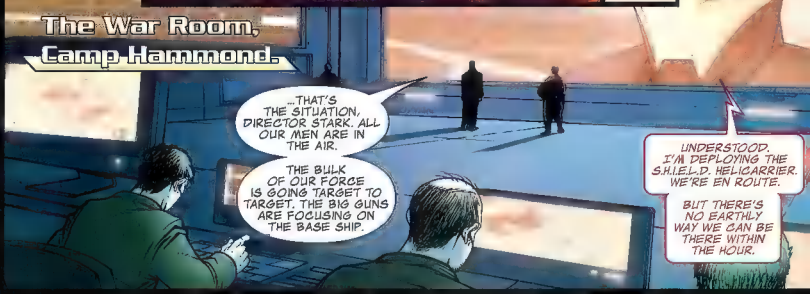
ZZAK
NEEEEEEEE
I SO DID NOT SIGN UP FOR THIS..
CLOUD 9! STAY CLOSE, DAMN IT!
AHH!
FOOF
BAM
"HEROES AMERICA CAN LOOK UP TO. YEAH, RIGHT."
FOOM
YES. YES YOU DID.
BRRZAP!

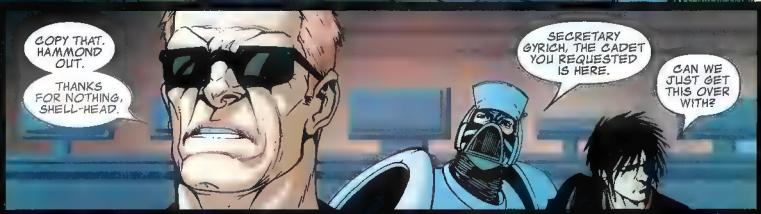
CHOOM
C'MON, ABBY. JUST POINT AND CLICK. IT'S JUST LIKE X-BOX. JUST LIKE--

HOLY--
I JUST BLEW UP A PLANE.
GOOD.


NO. I MEAN, IN CARTOONS WHEN THEY DO THAT, YOU ALWAYS SEE THE GUY BAIL OUT WITH A PARACHUTE.
BUT HE WAS STILL *IN THERE!* I COULD FEEL THE *HEAT* FROM THE BLAST AND--
IT'S NOT LIKE THE CARTOONS AT ALL, IS IT?

NO. IT'S NOT.


The War Room,
Camp Hammond.
...THAT'S THE SITUATION, DIRECTOR STARK. ALL OUR MEN ARE IN THE AIR.
THE BULK OF OUR FORCE IS GOING TARGET TO TARGET. THE BIG GUNS ARE FOCUSING ON THE BASE SHIP.
UNDERSTOOD. I'M DEPLOYING THE S.H.I.E.L.D. HELICARRIER. WE'RE EN ROUTE.
BUT THERE'S NO EARTHLY WAY WE CAN BE THERE WITHIN THE HOUR.

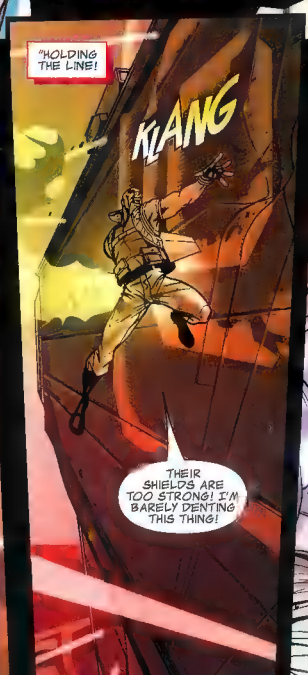

COPY THAT. HAMMOND OUT.
THANKS FOR NOTHING, SHELL-HEAD.
SECRETARY GYRICH, THE CADET YOU REQUESTED IS HERE.
CAN WE JUST GET THIS OVER WITH?

TERRANCE WARD, CODE NAME: TRAUMA. THAT'S TWICE, SON.
TWO TIMES YOU'VE MESSED WITH MY @#%*.
WHAT? YOU'RE TRYING TO SCARE ME? THAT'S NOT HOW IT WORKS. LOOK...

I DIDN'T WORK OUT. I GET IT. SO JUST DO WHATEVER YOU HAVE TO...
...AND KICK ME OUT ALREADY. WE BOTH KNOW I SHOULDN'T BE HERE.

NO, YOU SHOULDN'T. YOU SHOULD BE OUT THERE, WITH THEM!

"FIGHTING FOR YOUR COUNTRY!
HSSS!
YAHH!
HY-012


"HOLDING THE LINE!
KLANG
THEIR SHIELDS ARE TOO STRONG! I'M BARELY DENTING THIS THING!

ULTRAGIRL!
"NO MATTER WHAT THE COST!"

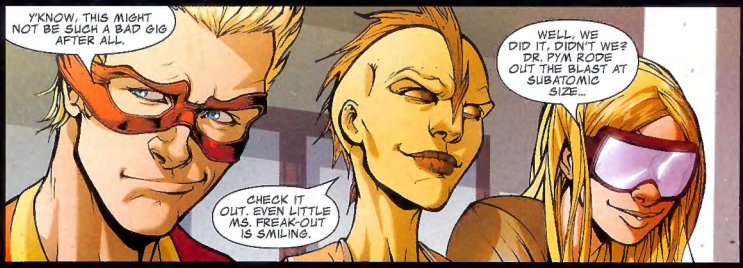
NO, GAUNTLET, IT'S WORKING!
SO FAR, NOTHING'S GETTING THROUGH, BUT WE'RE DRAINING ALL THEIR POWER!
LOOK! THEIR STABILIZERS ARE GIVING OUT!
COMMANDER, ALL OUR SHIPS ARE GONE!
ENERGY RESERVES ARE DEPLETED! WEAPONS SYSTEMS ARE DOWN!
WHAT NOW, SIR?
WE USE OUR FINAL WEAPON, THE SHIP ITSELF. RAMMING SPEED!
HAIL HYDRA! CUT OFF A LIMB, AND TWO MORE WILL TAKE ITS PLACE!
NO CHOICE. HAVE TO FIRE "THE STINGER"!
BOOM
EXPERIENCING TURBULENCE. THE VIBRANIUM CASING IS HOLDING...

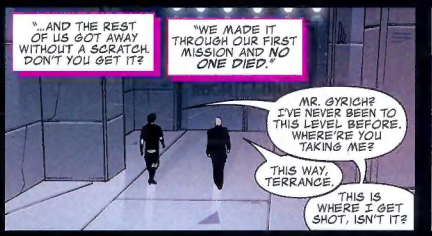
PASSED THROUGH THE ENERGY FIELD! I'M IN!
OPERATION: TROJAN HORSEFLY IS A GO!
ANGLING DESCENT TOWARDS THE SHIP!
CONTACT!
INCREASING MASS!
WHAT'S HE DOING?
HE'S GROWING TO GIANT SIZE, SHIFTING HIS WEIGHT, CHANGING THEIR TRAJECTORY...
"HE'S GOING TO SCUTTLE THE SHIP!"

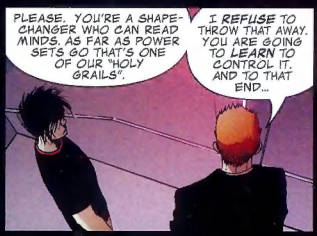
ONE MAN VERSUS A SHIP OF THOUSANDS. SAVING THE LEADER OF THE FREE WORLD.
NOT BAD.
FROM NOW ON, THIS IS WHAT THEY'LL THINK OF WHENEVER THEY THINK OF YOU.
YELLOW-JACKET?
HE'S TOTALLY CLEAR. WHAT'S HE WAITING FOR?!
PYM!!!
"WE ARE HERE TODAY TO HONOR DR. HENRY PYM. SCIENTIST, HUMANITARIAN, AVENGER..."

The White House Rose Garden, Washington, D.C.
...WITH THE PRESIDENTIAL MEDAL OF FREEDOM, WITH MILITARY DISTINCTION.
FOR YEARS WE'VE CALLED MEN LIKE HANK SUPER HEROES, 'CAUSE THEY HAVE POWERS THE REST OF US DON'T.
BUT TODAY, SERVING AS PART OF OUR PROUD MILITARY...

...HE AND HIS FELLOW INITIATIVE MEMBERS ARE NOW TAKIN' ON THE ROLE OF REAL HEROES!
YOU'RE DOIN' A HECK OF A JOB, PYMMY.
THANK YOU, MR. PRESIDENT.


Y'KNOW, THIS MIGHT NOT BE SUCH A BAD GIG AFTER ALL.
WELL, WE DID IT, DIDN'T WE? DR. PYM RODE OUT THE BLAST AT SUBATOMIC SIZE...
CHECK IT OUT. EVEN LITTLE MS. FREAK-OUT IS SMILING.


"...AND THE REST OF US GOT AWAY WITHOUT A SCRATCH. DON'T YOU GET IT?
"WE MADE IT THROUGH OUR FIRST MISSION AND NO ONE DIED."
MR. GYRICH? I'VE NEVER BEEN TO THIS LEVEL BEFORE. WHERE'RE YOU TAKING ME?
THIS WAY, TERRANCE.
THIS IS WHERE I GET SHOT, ISN'T IT?


PLEASE. YOU'RE A SHAPE-CHANGER WHO CAN READ MINDS. AS FAR AS POWER SETS GO THAT'S ONE OF OUR "HOLY GRAILS".
I REFUSE TO THROW THAT AWAY. YOU ARE GOING TO LEARN TO CONTROL IT. AND TO THAT END...

...WE'VE CALLED IN A "SPECIALIST."
PETEY!
HOW'S MY FAVORITE CANTANKEROUS, OVERBEARING BUREAUCRAT BIG SMILES! COME ON!
McCOY.
WHY DID THE XAVIER INSTITUTE SEND YOU?
OH MY STARS AND GARTERS. IS THAT ANY WAY TO GREET AN OLD FRIEND?
THE GIRL, McCOY. TELL ME YOU'VE BROUGHT THE GIRL.
BUT OF COURSE, I'M MERELY HERE IN THE CAPACITY OF A CHAPERONE.
I ASKED THE BEAST TO ACCOMPANY ME, MR. GYRICH, FOR TWO REASONS:
ONE, AS A BODYGUARD, SINCE M-DAY LEFT ME WITHOUT MY POWERS.
AND TWO, BECAUSE HE WAS DYING TO SEE YOU.
WHERE'S MY HUG?!
...
AND AS FOR YOU, MR. WARD, SINCE PETEY APPEARS TO BE SPEECHLESS...
...LET ME INTRODUCE YOU TO YOUR NEW PRIVATE TUTOR...
To Be Continued...